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CRISIS COMMUNICATION:  
A COMMANDERS GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE CRISIS  
COMMUNICATION

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

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### ***Abstract***

This research paper is a review of Air Force crisis communication training for commanders. As the primary spokesperson for their organization, commanders must know how to communicate during a crisis. This leads to the research question. How does the Air Force prepare commanders to communicate during a crisis and are they using effective crisis communication techniques.

The methodology is a review of crisis and crisis communication literature to develop a working definition of a crisis and crisis communication. The Air Force's Media Training program and training techniques are also reviewed to identify and describe effective crisis techniques. The crisis communication training program of a civilian crisis communication firm, Wilson Group Communications, is also reviewed. This comparison will provide information to help determine the effectiveness of the Air Force training program compared to a civilian organization. The comparisons identified common crisis communication techniques and provide information for a commanders guide.

The research concludes that the Air Force has a very credible crisis communication training program for commanders. It's required training and the information, techniques and skills taught are identical to the Wilson Group's program. The Air Force teaches crisis communication techniques recognized by leading crisis communication researchers, scholars and practitioners.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*If crises have taught the world anything, it is that a crisis in business can occur today with little or no warning, anywhere, anytime. It can happen to any company, large or small, public or private. The safest assumption is that a crisis looms on the horizon..*

—Steven Fink

Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable

Crises are inevitable. No individual or organization is immune. A crisis is one of the purest forms of global equality blind to race, culture, gender, religion, occupation and income. A crisis is an equal opportunity employer. Every organization will experience some form of a crisis. They are rarely planned, surface unexpectedly and disrupt normal operations. They can be as visual and visible as a raging fireball explosion or as stealthy and veiled as racial discrimination and sexual harassment. A few telltale signs that an organization or individual has been victimized by a crisis are shock, surprise, disbelief and confusion. These inevitable events have been referred to as an explosion of normality with a nature all its own that for the moment turn the world upside down.<sup>1</sup> Air Force commanders have experienced, endured, failed and survived their share of crises.

A review of Air Force accidents and incidents vividly demonstrate the unpredictability, disruption and frustration associated with a crisis. Two F-15's shot down an Army helicopter. A C-130 and F-16 collided in mid air killing 24 Army paratroopers on the ground. A T-43, carrying the Secretary of Commerce crashed into a

mountain killing all passengers. A terrorist bomb exploded outside Khobar Towers killing 19 airmen. Lieutenant Kelly Flinn, the Air Force's first female B-52 bomber pilot, faced a courts-martial for violating orders, making a false official statement, conduct unbecoming an officer, fraternization and adultery. Air Force Chief of Staff, General Ronald Fogleman, handed in his resignation stating he "may be out of step with the times and thinking of some of the establishment."<sup>2</sup> Each one of these events occurred with little or no warning and created an environment often associated with a crisis ... chaos.

These were just a few of the nationally publicized crises Air Force commanders experienced. Each event met the criteria of a crisis. They were unplanned, unexpected and disrupted normal routine operations in the Air Force. Crisis are frequently described as isolated incidents, uncharacteristic occurrences, unusual circumstances or simply tragic and unfortunate accidents. However, the bottom line is a crisis occurred. An event happened that wasn't supposed to happen. No one planned, expected or anticipated the crisis happening, but it did.

Some of the crises Air Force commanders faced were highly publicized, while most were quietly resolved with little or no media and public scrutiny. Nevertheless, these events had two common characteristics. First, they were a crisis. Second, commanders had to, and in some cases were forced to, publicly discuss the facts, impact, operational changes and consequences of the crisis on the Air Force and individuals involved. This leads to a logical question. Does the Air Force teach their commanders how to communicate during a crisis?



When executed properly direct communication from the leader can help the organization gain control of a crisis. His presence, concern and comments can instill public confidence, trust and support for the organization. How the leader decides to communicate, or not communicate, during a crisis can have long term affects and implications on the organization. It can impact their public image and the length of time it takes the organization to resume normal operations. At a minimum, a crisis will change the way an organization conducts business in the future.

During a crisis commanders must communicate with multiple publics.<sup>3</sup> This includes the airmen and civilians they command, family members, the local community, congressional representatives and the general public. This is often accomplished through the media. Today a crisis that in the past could have been resolved quietly through internal channels are told, sold, leaked, uncovered and discovered by the media. The technological and information revolution has given the media a tremendous amount of power, influence, access and leverage. They have the capability to provide real time information within seconds and provide live updates. The immediacy of news and it's ability to influence pubic opinion puts a tremendous burden of responsibility on the commander to communicate during a crisis.

Effective communication during a crisis requires composure, control and patience. There are specific crisis communication techniques and skills that should be applied during a crisis. These techniques can be taught and are normally used by organizational spokespersons. Academic scholars and professional practitioners advocate the value and benefits of knowing how to execute effective communication techniques, particularly during a crisis.<sup>4</sup>

This research is not a critical analysis of Air Force crisis communication procedures. It is a review of the Air Force's crisis communication training program and comparison to a civilian crisis communications firm. The results will assist in determining the effectiveness of the Air Force's crisis communication training program. This review and comparison will answer the research question. How are Air Force commanders prepared to communicate during a crisis, and are they being taught effective crisis communication techniques? The research results will also identify effective crisis communication techniques. Finally, based on the results and literature review, a commanders guide to effective crisis communication will be developed.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Umansky, David, How to Survive and Prosper When It Hits the Fan, Public Relations Quarterly, Winter 1993-94

<sup>2</sup> Fogleman, Ronald, General, Chief of Staff letter To The Men and Women of the United States Air Force, July 30, 1997

<sup>3</sup> Umansky, David, How to Survive and Prosper When It Hits the Fan, Public Relations Quarterly, Winter 1993-94

<sup>4</sup> Nuderk, Mayer, and Antokol, Norman. The Handbook for Effective Emergency and Crisis Management, Lexington Books, 1988

## Chapter 2

### Crisis and Crisis Communication

*The initial response is critical. It has the power to restore order or chaos; to heal and soothe or heighten tension and cause friction; to clarify and reassure or cast doubt and increase uncertainty. It is a moment that in many instances can forever shape the image, reputation and sometimes destiny of the company, person or product.*

—Robert Fisher, President, Fisher & Associates Public Relations

#### A Crisis Defined

What exactly is a crisis? How do you know when your organization is involved in a crisis? How does a crisis define itself? There are as many definitions of the word and descriptions of the event as there are researchers and victims of crises. Webster defines a crisis as a sudden turn for better or worse; a decisive moment; an unstable state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending; situation that has reached a critical phase.<sup>1</sup>

Umansky embraces Webster's definition of a crisis and describes it in more practical terms. He describes it as a messy, serious problem that has a nature all it's own. It's an explosion of normality that turns the world upside down.<sup>2</sup> To better understand a crisis he identified eight universal characteristics of a crisis. They are surprise; insufficient information; escalating flow of events; loss of control; intense scrutiny from outside; siege mentality; panic; and short term focus. (See appendix A)

Umansky argues that once the explosive nature of a crisis is understood, “you begin to sense the danger of not doing what you can to prepare for it while your world is right side up.”<sup>3</sup> He also believes whether the change associated with a crisis is negative or positive is up to the individual. This represents the Chinese way of thinking about a crisis.

For centuries, the Chinese embraced the concept there is a positive side to every crisis. The symbol for their word crisis, “wei-ji”, is a combination of two words, “danger” and “opportunity.”<sup>4</sup> Crisis management and crisis communication literature has built upon this unique Chinese cultural concept. It is consistently mentioned in crisis communication research and applied to case studies and professional reviews of civilian and military crises.

This centuries old concept has led researchers to conclude that despite the obvious danger surrounding a crisis, with proper preparation, anticipation and training there will always be positive opportunities. This theory is being used by a growing number of crisis management, risk communication, crisis communication and public relations researchers and practitioners. However, this universally accepted concept does not eliminate a debate over researchers agreeing on the definition of a crisis.

Years of interviewing business managers and communication professionals have led crisis management researchers Pauchant and Mitroff to conclude the concept of crisis has been “overused and poorly defined.”<sup>5</sup> They contend managers have confused crisis with such concepts as accidents, incidents and conflict. Their definition of a crisis based on the normal operating procedures of a system. Pauchant and Mitroff define a crisis as a

physical disruption that affects a whole system and threatens its basic assumptions and existential core.<sup>6</sup>

Their definition of crisis, as it relates to a system as a company or organization, requires two conditions. First, the whole system or organization must be affected or physically disturbed in its entirety. This disruption could be the grounding of all Air Force aircraft for a service wide “no fly” day to address safety issues. Second, the basic assumptions of the members of that system need to be challenged to the point where they are forced either to realize the faulty foundation of these assumptions or develop defense mechanisms against these assumptions. Pauchant and Mitroff point out the second symbolic or social level condition is the most “poignant manifestation” of a crisis.

They present a clear distinction between the concept of crisis and incident. A crisis must disrupt the whole system or organization and challenge the basic assumptions of the members of the system. An event is not a crisis if it only affects a self contained part of a system or organization. It is an incident. A crisis must have a symbolic affect and physically disrupt the entire organization.

Steven Fink, a crisis management expert, applies the unpredictability of a crisis and the Chinese cultural approach to describe how to deal with a crisis. He believes a crisis is not necessarily bad and puts a positive spin on the situation. He does not dispute a crisis is an unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending. Instead, Fink describes a crisis as a fluid, unstable and dynamic situation characterized by a degree of risk and uncertainty. He argues there is a 50-50 chance the outcome can be either highly undesirable or highly desirable with extremely positive outcomes.<sup>7</sup> He suggests if you can predict and plan for the “turning point” of a crisis you have a better

chance of capitalizing on opportunities, as opposed to letting the crisis catch you unprepared.

Fink concludes a crisis not handled in a timely manner will follow a particular pattern or phase of development. The four crisis phases are prodromal, acute, chronic and crisis resolution.<sup>8</sup> Not every crisis has all four stages, but they can't have more than four. The first stage is the prodromal. It is the warning stage which alerts you to a problem. It's described as the real turning point. Warnings are evident but usually no action is taken by the organization until it moves to the next stage. The prodromal stage is the easiest stage to manage. Unfortunately, every crisis does not have a warning stage. There will be times when an organization will have little or no advance warning. It's also possible for an organization to recognize the warnings of an impending crisis but not be able to prevent it from occurring. All they can do is prepare for the next stage. A crisis is any prodromal situation that runs the risk of:

- Escalating in intensity
- Falling under close media or government scrutiny
- Interfering with the normal operations of business
- Jeopardizing the positive public image presently enjoyed by a company
- Damaging a company's bottom line in any way

The acute crisis stage is the point of no return. Some damage has been done and the general public is aware of the situation. However, with proper advance planning you can manage and control when, where and how you want the crisis to erupt. The advantage is you have time to prepare. You also have some ability to control the flow, speed and duration of the crisis and exert some degree of influence. An example would be the Department of Defense controlling the impact of unfavorable news by releasing information to the Pentagon Press Corps close to publication and broadcast deadlines

This technique is often used to manage a crisis during the acute stage. It was often used during the Base Realignment and Closure process. Rather than releasing the results early in the week, majority of the public announcements were released late Friday afternoon. Furthermore, wing commanders were not authorized to confirm or comment about the impact on their base until DOD officials released their official statement. This tactic pushes a story into the two day weekend cooling off period. Although the acute state seems like the longest phase, it is often the shortest. However, depending on the type of crisis and severity or value of the outcome it can be the most intense.

The chronic crisis stage is called the clean-up phase. Investigations and audits are conducted, media interviews granted and explanations develop. This is a time for recovery, self-analysis, self-doubt and healing. This is the longest phase and it can linger indefinitely. The fourth and final stage is crisis resolution. The crisis is resolved and the organization has returned to normal routine operations. Historically, crisis stages evolve in a cyclical fashion. Rarely will an organization or individual dealing with a crisis have the luxury of handling one crisis at a time. Fink described characteristics of a crisis:

- Intense, unstable state resulting in decisive change
- Crucial turning point for better or worse
- Eventual outcome can be negative or positive
- Decisions will determine ability to survive and prosper
- Unplanned and unexpected events that disrupt normal operations

Just as researches and scholars have slightly different definitions of a crisis, one can conclude what might be a crisis to one person could be viewed as an incident, conflict or less threatening event to another. Therefore, each event should be judged and determined individually on its own merits whether it is a crisis or something less. Fink, Pauchant and Mitroff did seem to reach similar conclusions about the characteristics of a crisis.

A crisis will disrupt normal operations and have undesirable outcomes. Crises come in clusters, bunches and pairs, never in black and white. Each crisis will be in a different stage. Fink maintains crises are inevitable and the safest assumption is a “crisis looms on the horizon” and can strike with little or no warning. Pauchant and Mitroff make a strong argument that some organizations are simply more crisis-prone than others.<sup>9</sup> Irregardless how one defines the word crisis, research seems to support the idea that despite preparation and prevention efforts a crisis will occur.

The great Prussian military theorist Clausewitz might agree that a crisis has the same characteristics and qualities as friction in war. Friction, like a crisis, has a lot to do with chance. They both “bring about effects that cannot always be measured because they are largely due to chance.”<sup>10</sup> For the purpose of this research paper the working definition of a crisis is: an intense, unexpected and unstable state that disrupts normal operations and results in a crucial turning point for better or worst.

## **Crisis Communication**

*If the media can communicate the news the instant it happens, crisis communications dictate that a company must be prepared to respond almost as fast. The inability to communicate your message skillfully during a crisis can prove fatal. And it would be a totally needless demise, a wrongful death.*

—Steven Fink,  
Crisis Management

The basic purpose of communication is to create a mutual understanding and informed dialogue.<sup>11</sup> It’s a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviors.<sup>12</sup> Under normal conditions communicating information should be simple, but it’s a very complex and



dynamic process. A message can be affected by the sender, become distorted as it transmits through a medium or be misinterpreted by the receiver. During a crisis, the process is affected by confusion, fear, stress, and pressure.

Crisis communication is when an individual or organization communicates a message to the public, usually through the media, during a threatening, tragic or fatal accident that is unplanned or unexpected.<sup>13</sup> Technological advances, space orbiting commercial satellites and the capability of the media to broadcast live pictures and reports to a global audience have forced organizations to reevaluate their ability to communicate during a crisis. The potential damage to the organizations public trust, positive image, customer loyalty and financial losses have encouraged organizations to acquire crisis communications skills and techniques. Effective crisis communication can protect, and when necessary defend, an organization which ultimately will reinforce support from organizational allies and the public.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Vincent Covello, a leading environmental risk communication expert, suggests one of the problems organizations have in communicating risk information effectively is the limitation of government, industry and other spokespersons to communicate information about risks.<sup>15</sup> Risk communication is the exchange of information among interested parties about the nature, magnitude, significance or control of a risk. Risk communication mirrors crisis communication. They communicate a message, confirm facts, dispel rumors, and clarify details about unresolved issues

The levels of stress, fear, anger, and confusion surrounding a crisis can be physically and mentally exhausting. Covello advocates risk communication is an art and skill that requires substantial training, knowledge, preparation, practice and execution. It is not for

the weak at heart or thin skinned. Crisis communication skills can be taught. However, like any critical skill one must receive proper training and practice to maintain proficiency. Effective spokespersons must learn how to execute their skills and techniques under simulated and real crisis conditions.

One of the many challenges during a crisis is how the individual or organization communicates with their employees, customers, stakeholders and the general public. Crisis communications experts seem to agree that during a crisis the first opportunity to take advantage of is when it's time to explain what happened. Communicating during a crisis is a critical step. It's a criteria frequently used to judge the effectiveness of an organizations response and their ability to resolve the crisis in a timely manner. It's also used by the public to determine the organizations sense of responsibility, accountability, concern and care for the crisis victims and family members.<sup>16</sup>

Research has shown that when communicating during or after a crisis the public is most concerned about whether or not the spokesperson can understand and empathize with their discomforts. Covello advises during a crisis any messages must contain four elements. They are empathy and caring; competence and credibility; honesty and openness; dedication and commitment. (See appendix D) These elements should be communicated by the spokesperson during their first public comments. Wilson explains it best. "It's not just what you say and how you say it that's important in a crisis. It's the overall image you and your organization project that will shape public opinion ... it's not enough to talk about concern, compassion and control—you have to show it."<sup>17</sup>

Fisher claims crisis communications involves the "critical moment."<sup>18</sup> This is the first definitive communication a business makes about the disaster within the first 24

hours. It has the power to restore order or create chaos; heal and soothe or heighten tension and cause friction; clarify and reassure or cast doubt and increase uncertainty. It can forever shape the image, reputation and destiny of the company, person or product involved. An initial response should be instantaneous and acknowledge the obvious. A more thorough response should be made within 24 hours of the crisis. Fisher suggests if possible and practical, it is “highly advisable” to have the CEO personally visit the site. Common sense and logic should govern all decisions during the early moments of a crisis. Each crisis is unique, just as each organization’s decisions to communicate to the public.

The most respected examples of how to communicate during a crisis was demonstrated by Tylenol during their product tampering scare. The CEO immediately ordered all Tylenol products off the shelf and told the public they were investigating to determine if there really was product tampering. A less desirable response was demonstrated by Exxon during the Valdez oil spill. The CEO refused to make any public comments about the accident. Most seasoned crisis communication veterans believe if an organization cannot communicate their message during the initial stages of a crisis they have failed and the crisis will linger.

Agnes Huff, a senior vice president, of a public relations firm summarized the industry’s general thoughts about communicating during a crisis. “Crises, by nature, are generally complex and extremely dynamic. They leave only a small window of opportunity to do the right thing. Fortright and credible communications, will go a long way toward alleviating or minimizing damage or injury to your publics and your company’s reputation.”<sup>19</sup>

There are inherent risks and opportunities involved in crisis communication. It's prudent for the organization and its leaders to be aware of the consequences before they make public comments. If handled properly the positive opportunities will ease the burden of the crisis. However, if handled poorly, Nudell and Antokol are quick to point out "the results can haunt you and your organization for many years."<sup>20</sup> A spokesperson who speaks publicly during a crisis without the benefit of crisis communication or media training can cause more damage than the crisis itself. Communication is a critical part of any crisis and often the most visible. Today organizations are hiring crisis communication professionals to train their spokespersons how to communicate during a crisis.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, G& C Merriam Co., Springfield, MA, 1979

<sup>2</sup> Umansky, David, How to Survive and Prosper When It Hits the Fan, Public Relations Quarterly, Winter 1993-94

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Fink, Steven. Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable, American Management Association, New York, 1986

<sup>5</sup> Pauchant, C. Thierry, and Mitroff, I Ian. Transforming the Crisis-Prone Organization: Preventing Individual, Organizational, and Environmental Tragedies, 1992 by Joey-Bass Inc., San Francisco, CA

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Fink, Steven. Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable, American Management Association, New York, 1986

<sup>8</sup> Ibid,

<sup>9</sup> Pauchant, C. Thierry, and Mitroff, I Ian. Transforming the Crisis-Prone Organization: Preventing Individual, Organizational, and Environmental Tragedies, 1992 by Joey-Bass Inc., San Francisco, CA

<sup>10</sup> Von Clausewitz, Carl, On War, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1976

<sup>11</sup> Sheldon, Keith, Credibility Is Risky Business, An interview with Vincent T. Covello, Communication World, April, 1996

<sup>12</sup> Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, G& C Merriam Co., Springfield, MA, 1979

<sup>13</sup> Woodyard, Tyrone M., The Commander and the Media, Briefing presented to Wing and Group Commanders Course, Maxwell AFB, AL, May, 1997

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, Pat, 9 Ways Public Relations Contributes to the Bottom Line, Presentation at Defense Information School, Ft Benjamin Harrison, IN, 1994

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<sup>15</sup> Covello, Vincent T, Environmental Risk Communication and Public Dialogue, Risk Communication Conference, Hampton, Va February, 26, 1996

<sup>16</sup> Elsasser, John, TWA's Long, Hot Summer, TWA Flight 800: A Crisis Casebook, Public Relations Tactics, September 1996, <http://www.prsa.org/tacfiles/twaone96>

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, Steve, The Wilson Group, Nuggets Volumes IV,V,VI, Columbus, OH, 1997

<sup>18</sup> Fisher, Robert, Initial Response: There's No Second Chance, Hands, On: Crisis Communications, Public Relations Tactics, October, 1996

<sup>19</sup> Huff, Agnes, Building Your Team For Crisis Communications, Hands On: Crisis Communications, Public Relations Tactics, June 1996

<sup>20</sup> Nudikk, Mayer, and Antokol, Norman. The Handbook for Effective Emergency and Crisis Management, Lexington Books, 1988

## **Chapter 3**

### **Crisis Communication Training**

*In a crisis, people want reassurance that you and your organization know what you're doing and you're doing the right thing. It's not just what you say and how you say it that's important in a crisis. You need to find the most believable spokesperson and stick with your message during a crisis. It's important to tell it straight and get the facts out as soon as possible. They're going to come out sooner or later anyway, so they might as well come from you.*

—Steve Wilson, President, Wilson Group Communications

Crisis communication professionals are emerging as key players on the senior management team. Their unique skills and expertise can guide an organization through the storm of a crisis. The benefits of crisis communication training has captured the attention of government and private organizations who understand the potential damage associated with inappropriate or uninformed communications. History and case studies have demonstrated how organizations that execute effective crisis communication techniques consistently emerge from a crisis in a better position and recover faster.

#### **Wilson Group Crisis Communication Training**

Wilson Group Communications are crisis management specialists. They provide crisis management, public affairs and media training. They were selected because their program matched closely with the Air Force's and their staff is comprised of highly qualified veterans who have covered crises as newspaper reporters, broadcast journalists,

news anchors and producers. The diversity of their client list (Fortune 500 companies and small businesses) the president's commitment to crisis communication education and unlimited access to training materials were key to selecting this organization.

Wilson Group crisis communications training consists of mock disasters, media training and presentation skills training. Clients are taught in small, hands-on group workshops. The value of the training is based on their ability to provide realistic and challenging. To test an organization's crisis communication plan they conduct mock disasters. These disasters are as close to real as possible and includes reporters, live-cameras and actors. Trained, experienced people are key to their business success.<sup>1</sup>

When an organization is embroiled in a crisis, certain things must happen besides the rescue workers, curious bystanders and the media racing to the scene. Some form of communication must take place. The organization must explain what happened. Case studies have shown that individuals that received formal crisis communication training have a better probability of successfully explaining what happened and leading their organization through a crisis. A review of Wilson Communication crisis communication training program was conducted to compare it to Air Force training programs and identify common crisis communication techniques.

There seems to be universal acceptance amongst crisis communication experts of the Chinese concept that opportunities will always be present during a crisis. Crisis communication consultant Steve Wilson, who has conducted more than 70 crisis management and media training workshops and on-site counsel throughout the U.S, also believes organizations can find opportunity in the midst of a crisis. He emphasizes that

during a crisis the organization and spokespersons must be prepared and know where to look to find opportunities.

Wilson teaches the foundation for successful crisis communication programs are built on three pillars.<sup>2</sup> A crisis plan, crisis team and media trained spokesperson. The purpose of a crisis plan is to identify the responsibilities of each member. It directs what needs to be done, who should do it and how it should be accomplished. The plan must be simple and clear. More importantly, it should be reviewed, practiced and updated regularly.

The crisis team should be a group of hand picked individuals with specialized training, skills and expertise. The group is responsible for preparing the organization for a crisis before it happens and deal with it when they occur.<sup>3</sup> This team should be trained and prepared to respond to a variety of potential organizational crises. The key members of the team are the leader and designated spokesperson. These individuals who lead the organization and interact with the media and public. Although each of the pillars are important to crisis communication, this section will only address the techniques Wilson Communications uses to teach how to communicate during a crisis. (See appendix B)

The key to effective crisis communication is how the spokesperson interacts and communicates with the media. During a crisis media will be present. Wilson trains organizations to be willing and prepared to address the media. Initial contact is critical because it gives the organization the first opportunity to gain and maintain control of the crisis. Wilson points out making the decision of when and who talks during a crisis involves more than just picking someone to talk to the press. He advocates it should be the designated spokesperson who has been trained to anticipate questions and deliver



appropriate answers. Wilson believes and teaches that at a minimum the spokesperson should be prepared to answer three basic questions.<sup>4</sup> What happened? What caused it? What are you doing about it?

Wilson Group Communications teaches spokespersons how to develop responses before talking to the media. Clients are guided through intensive television, radio and newspaper mock television interviews. Instructors research and develop realistic crisis scenarios that include dramatic and aggressive media role playing during a simulated crises related to the organization's operations. Spokespersons are taught to anticipate questions, develop responses and deliver key messages in a credible manner. An effective spokesperson must know how to think before they speak, keep answers short and be pleasant when dealing with media requests.<sup>5</sup> These are a few of the critical crisis communication techniques and skills that often determine the difference between success and failure.

Crisis communication and media training develop the spokesperson's confidence and enhances their communication skills and techniques. Wilson stresses the training should be taught using a critical and constructive approach under some degree of pressure. The hands on training and guidance teaches spokespersons how to get their point across without rambling or volunteering negative information.<sup>6</sup>

Wilson's training demonstrates how choosing not to speak can create an information vacuum that will be filled by speculation and misinformation generated by the media, disgruntled employees or inaccurate details provided by eyewitnesses. A crisis communication survey found only 19% of consumers believed companies were totally truthful during a crisis. Even more alarming for organizations were the three sources of

information considered to be most credible. Eyewitnesses, 94%, independent experts, 89% and victims or victims' families, 84%.<sup>7</sup> There are more risks of inaccuracy and misinformation if a spokesperson refuses to deal honestly and openly with the media. If there's a real story, particularly negative ones, the media will get the information from somewhere else. Bad news travels faster than good news on the slowest day. The Wilson Group recommends and instructs clients how to get the facts out without highlighting the negative.

The spokesperson must know how to deliver unfavorable news while emphasizing the positive actions the organization has taken to resolve the crisis. They must learn how to master this invaluable communication skill. It requires the ability to acknowledge the negative but highlight and focus on communicating the positive. Case studies have shown it's usually more advantageous for organizations to release less favorable information through their own spokesperson.

The key to crisis communication is total preparation. This specifically applies to the designated spokespersons. They have the critical role of gaining and maintaining control of the crisis. Wilson advocates it must be someone in authority who knows what's going on and can answer tough questions under hostile conditions. The spokesperson must be able to show concern, empathy and speak with conviction. Preparation means anticipating the obvious and most difficult questions like "how could you let this happen?" The spokesperson must have the intestinal fortitude to know when "I don't know or we'll do everything possible to find out and why this happened" is the only appropriate response.

Responding to media and public requests in a timely manner is effective crisis communication. During a crisis, premature and inaccurate statements from the organization's spokesperson that attribute blame, responsibility or wrongfully promise compensation should be avoided. Wilson Group Communications trains spokespersons about knowing when and how to quit talking, how to avoid volunteering negative information. Understanding how and when to hold sensitive information is another valuable technique. These are split second decisions that are made under emotional, stressful and demanding circumstances, often in the blinding lights of the media.

An untrained spokesperson can prolong the life of a crisis and cause unnecessary self-inflicted damage. The potential image, customer relations and financial losses associated with a crisis has driven more companies to put their spokesperson through formal media training instead of risking the results of "on-the-job" crisis communication. Many organizations are taking a proactive approach to crisis communication and have trained their leaders how to take advantage of opportunities during a crisis.

### **Air Force Crisis Communication Training**

*There are inherent risks associated with flying airplanes and operating a major corporation like the Air Force. When an incident occurs that concerns the public about their health, money, safety, environment, fair and ethical practices and legal issues, the public expects expedient answers. It's critical that the Air Force acknowledges the incident quickly, provides accurate information, works with the public to address their concerns and minimize risk.*

—Air Force Media Training Guidebook

The Air Force has incorporated the Chinese concept of looking for positive opportunities during a crises into their crisis communication and media training programs. At the Air Force's Ira Eaker College for Professional Development, Wing and

Group Commander's Course, newly selected wing and group commanders attend a media training lecture and workshop. This hands-on training teaches commanders how to anticipate, prepare and respond to questions from the media during a variety of scenarios. Commanders are taught how to prepare for media interviews and develop messages that focus on positive events related to the crisis. They are also briefed on the Department of Defense's policy of maximum disclosure, minimum delay and the importance of releasing information to the public in a timely manner.

The Air Force has a long standing policy to provide prompt official statements about accidents or incidents. Air Force Instructions require commanders and public affairs officers to provide a public statement or news release to the public and media.<sup>8</sup> All confirmed and releasable information that does not violate the privacy act must be released within one hour of official notification.

Air Force commanders are trained to accept the responsibility and privilege to command. Once the command flag has been accepted their crisis clock begins ticking. During their time in command, a crisis will erupt. Fink has drawn the conclusion that a crisis is not necessarily bad news...merely reality. When a crisis hits, there is no question who the key spokesperson is. It's the commander.

Keeping an open line of communication is one of the most challenging responsibilities of being a commander.<sup>9</sup> During a crisis, the commander is obligated to communicate because the morale, good order and discipline of the organization will be affected. The commander has a duty to explain the facts, causes, impact and corrective actions. Members of the organization, local community and the media expect and often demand to hear timely and accurate information from the senior member of the

organization. In today's world of instant communication, it's essential that Air Force leaders be able to effectively engage the media and tell the Air Force's story to the public accurately and quickly to maintain public support.<sup>10</sup> Communicating under normal circumstances is difficult, but during a crisis it can be extremely intimidating and a humbling experience.

The Air Force believes to maintain public support it is essential for commanders to know how to communicate during a crisis. They must be able to effectively engage the media and tell the Air Force's side of the story, good or bad.<sup>11</sup> To prepare commanders the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs has a media training program that teaches communication techniques and skills "necessary to win on the media battlefield." (See Appendix C) During a crisis, winning means being ready, able and willing to tell the Air Force's version of the story with their messages before the media or someone else does.<sup>12</sup> Commanders must be able to speak to the media during the unstable, rapidly changing stages of a crisis. They have the responsibility to inform the public about complex issues and processes in an understandable way.

Every wing and group commander is required to attend the Air Force's Media Training course. This is a mandatory training requirement directed by General Ronald Fogleman, former Chief of Staff.<sup>13</sup> The course is taught by Air Force field grade public affairs officers and civilians. Each instructor has a minimum of 12 years in public affairs and first hand crisis communication experience and expertise.

The Air Force's Risk Communications training teaches commanders how to conduct media interviews during major crises. The course is taught in four or eight hour blocks and is conducted in tailored one-on-one sessions or small hands on groups. Air Force

media trainers use case studies and video newscasts of Air Force people interviewed by the media. Training consists of mock one-on-one interview settings with cameras and media role players. Commanders are taught how to develop and prepare messages, control the interview and interact with the media. The objective of media training is to teach commanders how to successfully engage and inform the public through the media.

Air Force risk communication training focuses on winning public trust and maintaining credibility by educating and involving the public.<sup>14</sup> The military has a distinct advantage. Over the last four years when asked which institutions they have a “great deal of confidence in” the military received the highest public confidence ratings. They have consistently out ranked congress, the media, colleges, television news and the White House.<sup>15</sup>

The Air Force stresses the key to successful risk and crisis communication is trust and credibility. Commanders are taught the importance and value of using the media to establish public trust and credibility during a crisis. Critiques and reviews of previous commanders taped interviews during past Air Force crises are used to demonstrate effective crisis communication techniques. Instructors also emphasize why spokespersons need to understand the constraints and requirements of the media and the potential negative results of not accommodating or compromising to meet their needs. This was demonstrated by former Air Force Secretary Shelia Widnall and Air Combat Commander, General Richard Hawley during the Lt Flinn crisis. They appeared live on CNN’s Larry King call in talk show to explain the Air Force’s position and their decision to the American public.

Commanders are taught specific tips and techniques on how to conduct successful media interviews. Instructors focus on how to prepare for media interviews, developing key messages, establishing rules of engagement and controlling the interviews. This training involves on camera mock interviews addressing issues unique to the commanders organization. A critical training point is teaching commanders to recognize and accept the fact that all news will not be good.

Commanders are taught the best way to handle bad news during a crisis is to tell it all and tell it quickly. They are also given techniques to help them prepare an appropriate response without saying “no comment.” During the mock scenarios, instructors demonstrate how a spokesperson can make bad news worst by not knowing the facts, changing their story or challenging the media. Commanders are given pointers on how to avoid threatening interview situations during a crisis. Instructors point out how inappropriate communication can quickly destroy public trust and any established credibility they had as Air Force spokespersons. Air Force risk communication training emphasizes four basic perceptions that shape public opinion of organizations and their leadership.

Research has shown perceptions can have a significant impact on how the public perceives an organization is handling a crisis.<sup>16</sup> The public wants to know if the spokesperson shares and understands the concerns of the people affected; the expertise and competence of the spokesperson; the spokespersons integrity and ability to be honest and open; and if the spokesperson is dedicated to maintaining or developing a solution to the concern. Commanders are taught how to communicate and convey empathy, honesty

and openness. During a crisis these perceptions can enhance or damage public trust, support and credibility of the Air Force.

The Air Force trains their commanders to understand the critical role the media play in transmitting information. Commanders are taught why they must meet the needs of the media to effectively communicate their message. Brig Gen Sconyers, Air Force Director of Public Affairs, commented how many in the military hold on to the maxim “their deadlines are no my deadlines.” He vividly points out that their deadlines are often our deadlines if we want to tell the Air Force story and enhance public support.<sup>17</sup>

Air Force media trainers are very detailed when they teach commanders how to prepare and deliver key messages. The most critical technique is telling the Air Force story accurately and in a timely manner, particularly during a crisis. During any low trust/high concern situation emotions run high and the public’s attention span is limited. Recognizing this, Air Force’s crisis communication training places a priority on commanders establishing and maintaining trust and credibility. They also encourage commanders to establish a working relationship with the media. Air Force crisis communication training emphasizes building and maintaining trust, credibility, honesty, openness and accessibility. These seem to be the foundation of the Air Force’s crisis communication training program.

There are a number of similarities between the Air Force and Wilson Group crisis communications programs. In some aspects the training techniques, objectives and goals are identical. Both programs insist on using realistic scenarios with mock interviews and instructors role playing the media. Training is conducted in small groups by experienced trainers. Both organizations stress hands on training and taped on-camera interviews



followed by individual critique sessions. Each scenario is researched and tailored to the organizations operations which makes the training realistic and challenging.

This brief review and comparison of both programs revealed similar crisis communication techniques and skills. These techniques are frequently defined and discussed in leading Public Relations journals and trade. The results of this review and comparison of the Air Force and Wilson Group crisis communication training programs further suggest there are guiding principles that define how to execute effective crisis communications.

### Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Wilson, Steve, Develop An Effective Crisis Communications Plan, Chemical Engineering Progress

<sup>3</sup> Smith, Perry, Taking Charge, A Practical Guide for Leaders, National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C, 1986

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, Steve, The Wilson Group, Nuggets Volumes IV,V,VI, Columbus, OH, 1997

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, Steve, Develop An Effective Crisis Communications Plan, Chemical Engineering Progress

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Trendwatch, Public Relations Tactics August, 1996

<sup>8</sup> Air Force Instruction 35-102, Public Affairs, Crisis Planning, Management and Response, Secretary of the Air Force, Office of Public Affairs, June, 1994

Air Force Instruction 35-206, Public Affairs, Media Relations, Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, June 1994

<sup>9</sup> Guidelines for Command, A Handbook on the Leadership of People for Air Force Commanders and Supervisors, Air University Press, Maxwell AFB, AL, 1995

<sup>10</sup> Sconyers, Ronald, Brig Gen, USAF, Revolutionary Air Force Public Affairs: The Vision, Engineered for Breakthrough Performance, A White Paper, Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, Air Power Journal, Fall 1995

<sup>11</sup> Media Training Guidebook, Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, January, 1997

<sup>12</sup> Sconyers, Ronald, Brig Gen, USAF, Revolutionary Air Force Public Affairs: The Vision, Engineered for Breakthrough Performance, A White Paper, Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, Air Power Journal, Fall 1995

<sup>13</sup> Gibson, T'Jae, Interview with Ms Gibson, Air Force Media Trainer, Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, October, 1997

## Notes

<sup>14</sup> Media Training Guidebook, Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, January, 1997

<sup>15</sup> Scarborough, Rowan, Poll Gives Military its Top Rating, Washington Times, February 17, 1998

Air Force Communications Council, Gallup Poll results briefed at the quarterly meeting for Air Force Major Command Public Affairs Directors, October, 1997

<sup>16</sup> Media Training Guidebook, Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, January, 1997

<sup>17</sup> Sconyers, Ronald, Brig Gen, USAF, Revolutionary Air Force Public Affairs: The Vision, Engineered for Breakthrough Performance, A White Paper, Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, Air Power Journal, Fall 1995

## Chapter 4

### Principles of Crisis Communication

*It's very easy to be a Monday morning quarterback and second guess people's response during a crisis. But there are certain basic principles that must be adhered to. You must show up. You must show that you care. You must do everything you can to ensure the public safety and show what you're doing.*

—Aviva Diamond  
President, Blue Streak Communications

Military commanders study the principles of war to give them a better understanding of warfare. For centuries commanders have analyzed these principles to develop and prepare them for decisions they might encounter on the battlefield. The principles are objective; offensive; mass; economy of force; maneuver; unity of command; security; surprise and simplicity.<sup>1</sup> (See appendix E) These guiding principles have been accepted as proven truths for commanders employing military forces in combat. For some commanders, these principles provide a checklist for battlefield success.<sup>2</sup> For the wiser, the principles are merely ideas to use as a reference point of departure before making critical decisions during combat operations. Commanders who know and understanding how to apply the principles of war should have little difficulty applying the principles to crisis communication.

Communicating with the media during a crisis often creates a combat type environment with distinct battlefield characteristics. The media can attack, put a

spokesperson on the defensive, surprise and confuse the organization with misinformation creating an environment of chaos and uncertainty. Commanders who've dealt with the media during a crisis frequently refer to the experience as walking into a "media battlefield" or "media minefield." These less than pleasant experiences have inspired a number of practitioners to develop principles of crisis. A commander can gain control of a crisis and win the media battle by understanding how to employ and execute crisis communication principles.

Umansky, proposed eight principles of crisis communication. (See appendix F) They are centralize information flow; develop a crisis team; define objectives; contain the problem; show concern; assume the worst will happen; answer what happened and use direct communication.

The lynchpin of Umansky's principles is communication. His 40 years of dealing with crises makes a strong case for his belief that communication is the key to resolving a crisis. He states, "the one thing that really encourages crisis is the silent treatment. If you don't communicate, it will spin out of control." His crisis communication principles were developed by thinking of a crisis the way the Chinese do. There is a problem, but there is also an opportunity. Umansky makes a strong claim that understanding the principles is key to successful and effective crisis communication.<sup>3</sup>

A comparison of the principles of war and crisis communications revealed a surprising correlation. Eight of the nine principles of war share similar characteristics with the principles of crisis communications. The shared principles are: objective; offensive; economy of force; maneuver; unity of command; security; surprise and simplicity.

<b>WAR</b>	<b>CRISIS COMMUNICATION</b>
• Objective	Define the problem and objective, concern
• Offensive communication	Concern, answer what happened, direct
• Economy of force	Centralize information flow, crisis team
• Maneuver	Crisis team, contain the problem
• Unity of command	Centralize information flow, crisis team, spokesperson
• Security	Centralize information flow, direct communications
• Surprise	Answer what happened, concern
• Simplicity	Centralize information flow, crisis team

Although the principles of war and crisis communication are described differently, they obviously have distinct similarities. It can be argued the principles provide a bridge connecting two highly charged and galvanizing events...war and a crisis. The identical characteristics shared by war and crisis communication principles should provide commanders with a clear understanding and recognizable application of how to execute effective crisis communication techniques.

Military commanders are intimately familiar with the principles of war, particularly as it relates to employing forces during combat. Their knowledge of the principles provide a common ground for them to recognize and learn the dynamics of crisis communication. Felman suggests military commanders use the principles of war to insure success in combat.<sup>4</sup> Umansky suggests the principles of crisis communication are the “rules of decorum” which must be followed to insure success during a crisis. The logical conclusion is to teach commanders how applying crisis communications principles during a crisis can produce the same “battlefield success” as applying the principles of war during combat.

As an institution, the military has an established track record of high public trust and public opinion ratings. Sconyers believes these high ratings are the direct result of

commanders being prepared and willing to tell the Air Force story and deliver Air Force messages at every opportunity. These are all valid points which demonstrate the dynamics of crisis communication. The high public confidence ratings also underscore the importance of understanding and employing effective crisis communication techniques.<sup>5</sup>

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Air Force Basic Doctrine, Air Force Doctrine Document 1, September 1997

<sup>2</sup> Felman, Marc, D. Lt Col, The Military/Media Clash and the New Principle of War, Media Spin, School of Advanced AirPower Studies, Thesis, Maxwell AFB, AL, Air University Press, 1993

<sup>3</sup> Umansky, David, How to Survive and Prosper When It Hits the Fan, Public Relations Quarterly, Winter 1993-94

<sup>4</sup> Felman, Marc, D. Lt Col, The Military/Media Clash and the New Principle of War, Media Spin, School of Advanced AirPower Studies, Thesis, Maxwell AFB, AL, Air University Press, 1993

<sup>5</sup> Scarborough, Rowan, Poll Gives Military its Top Rating, Washington Times, February 17, 1998

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## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

*The military and the media will inevitably conflict and the conflicts will not be settled in any fully satisfactory way to either side. The military tends to view the media as driven by market pressures and self-aggrandizement of journalists. The press, though often portrayed as cynical, also have a high regard for their vocation. Freedom of the press is highly valued in our country and is a necessary condition for an enlightened citizenry. The media tend to view military officials as doing what they can to avoid coverage of anything that will put the armed forces in bad light. There is more than a germ of truth to both sides*

—Carl Moskos and Thomas Ricks  
Reporting War When There Is No War

The Air Force has a very effective program for teaching commanders how to communicate during a crisis. The techniques are solid and the skills can easily be mastered by commanders. The Air Force risk communication and media training programs teach crisis communication techniques acknowledged and endorsed by leading crisis communication scholars, professional journals and practitioners. Their training methods are identical to the Wilson Group and a number of respected civilian and corporate crisis communication consulting firms.

The differences between how the Air Force trains commanders and civilian crisis communication programs train fortune 500 type clients is negligible. Both programs embrace the Chinese approach to a crisis. Where there is a crisis there is danger and opportunity. Air Force crisis communication training focuses on looking for

opportunities and being prepared to take advantage of them. One slight difference is the Air Force's emphasis on commanders establishing public trust and credibility before a crisis develops. There seemed to be a significant amount of effort spent on teaching commanders how to be media savvy and communicate clearly with credibility and conviction

The Air Force wants their commanders to be accessible and more willing to accept opportunities to develop a relationship with media representatives before a crisis erupts. This approach is recommended by a number of consultants who believe by establishing a working relationship with the media before a crisis, the spokesperson is more likely to be believed and given the benefit of the doubt when they can't or don't have answers during a crisis.

Their media training program incorporates a variety of techniques that prepare commanders for anything from a local crisis media interview to a hostile press conference with national media. The training is conducted in small groups with realistic hands-on and live on camera training. Commanders are taught how to develop key messages and deliver them in a confident and credible manner. The training teaches critical communication skills that are required to be an effective spokesperson during any type of crisis or hostile media situation. Their list of students includes former Secretary of Defense William Perry, and former chiefs of staff Generals Merrill McPeak and Ronald Fogleman. Air Force commanders are well prepared to communicate during a crisis.

The Air Force emphasizes the importance of crisis communication by making it a mandatory training requirement for all senior commanders from the group level and up.



They also provide follow up and just-in-time training for commanders and spokespersons to help them prepare for real-world media interviews. The training program reinforces the commander's duties as an Air Force spokesperson and the tremendous importance of maintaining public confidence and support for the Air Force.

Research and case studies have proven beyond doubt that there are universally accepted crisis communication techniques. The techniques can be taught and when executed properly can help guide an organization through a crisis with minimal damage. Based on this research, combined with personal and professional experiences, I have concluded the Air Force has a very solid and credible crisis communication program that teaches proven and effective crisis communication techniques. Using the results of this research, a proposed commanders guide to crisis communication was developed. (See Appendix G , H and I)

## Appendix A

### Universal Characteristics of a Crisis

**Surprise** – Either you didn't expect it to or you thought it might but hoped it never would

**Insufficient information** – No one in your organization knows the whole story and it's virtually impossible to make a well-informed decision.

**Escalating flow of events** – You've got ten decisions to make in the next ten minutes. One thing leads to another, and another and something else.

**Loss of control** – The corporate identity you've worked so hard to promote and protect suddenly is being chewed up and spit out by reporters, politicians, competitors, commentators, regulators and other bystanders, many of whom know little about you and care even less. This is a big story and everyone wants a piece of it.

**Intense scrutiny from outside** – You are trapped in the spotlight and everyone is watching. They will also question every aspect of your business and your ethics and they will look for past indiscretions.

**Siege mentality** – They've backed me into a corner. I'll kick my way out with my steel-toed truth shoes and set the record straight

**Panic** – Start pushing your people around in directions that go nowhere toward solution of the problem

**Short-term focus** – A team sifts through every newspaper article and videotape to find every mistake, misquote and misspelling so you can demand a retraction by noon.

## **Appendix B**

### **Wilson Group Crisis Communication Techniques**

#### **Be Prepared**

- Know what the interview subject is about
- Find out who is doing the interview
- Get familiar with the subject matter
- Find out what happened
- Establish rules of engagement and length of interview

#### **Know Your Message**

- What information do you want to get across
- Prepare and rehearse your response
- Stick to the facts
- Don't volunteer negative information
- Don't minimize the situation, acknowledge the obvious

#### **Package Your Message**

- Anticipate the questions and prepare responses
- Package your message in a format the media can use
- Talk in short, useable sound bites that are quotable
- Make your message clear and understandable
- Tell what happened and what you're doing about it

#### **Deliver With Conviction**

- Be accessible and willing to talk to the media
- Credibility is essential and the most important quality of a spokesperson
- Believe what you are saying or get someone else to say it
- Establish a record of telling the truth

#### **Select Designated Spokespersons**

- Pick senior, qualified individuals who are in a position of authority
- Media train all potential spokespersons
- Demonstrate control, concern, compassion and cooperation
- Stick to your message

## **Appendix C**

### **Air Force Crisis Communication Techniques**

#### **Prepare For The Interview**

- Learn about the reporter
- Know your audience, it's not the interviewer, it's the listening public
- Set the ground rules
- Develop and prepare your key messages
- Speak in short concise 15-30 second sound bites
- Find out all the details about the interview subject
- Take a public affairs representative to act as a liaison

#### **Acknowledge The Incident, Accident Or Crisis**

- Tell what has been confirmed and is releasable
- Provide timely and accurate information
- Address public concerns, but stick to the facts
- Convey control, concern, care and empathy
- Be aware of non verbal gestures
- Don't speculate, let the investigation find the causes
- Correct inaccurate and incorrect statements on the spot
- Develop messages which avoid saying "no comment"

#### **Establish And Maintain Trust And Credibility**

- Be accessible, talk to the media
- Stay calm and relaxed, channel nervous energy into conviction and concern
- Anticipate negative questions
- Be honest, open and speak with confidence and candor
- Use your personal and professional experience to establish credibility
- Understand media constraints and requirements, be aware of media deadlines
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know, give me time to find out"

## **Appendix D**

### **Elements of Risk Communications**

**Empathy and Caring:** Good listener, has compassion for public's concern

**Competence and Credibility:** Determined by organization's track record and spokesperson's characteristics such as presentation skills, education, popularity and experience

**Honesty and Openness:** Actions, words and nonverbal communication that convey truthfulness and candor

**Dedication and Commitment:** Availability to the press, updates on information, diligence in resolving the issue

## **Appendix E**

### **Principles of War**

**Objective** – Direct military operation toward a defined and attainable objective that contributes to strategic, operational or tactical aims.

**Offensive** – Act rather than react and dictate the time, place and purpose, scope, intensity and pace of operations. The initiative must be seized, retained and fully exploited.

**Mass** – Concentrate combat power at the decisive time and place.

**Economy of Force** – Create usable mass by using minimum combat power on secondary objectives. Make fullest use of all forces available.

**Maneuver** – Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power.

**Unity of Command** – Ensure unity of effort for every objective under one responsible commander.

**Security** – Protect friendly forces and their operations from enemy actions that could provide the enemy with unexpected advantage.

**Surprise** – Strike the enemy at a time and place or in a manner for which he is unprepared.

**Simplicity** – Avoid unnecessary complexity in preparing, planning and conducting military operations.

## Appendix F

### Principles of Crisis Communications

**Centralize information flow** – Create a crisis center with fax and telephone lines so the truth has a place to call home. Use this center as the sole voice speaking your company's messages loud and clear. Make sure your employees, suppliers and friends have the official information they need to support you.

**Develop a crisis team** – Isolate a multidisciplinary task force from your daily operations. Let this crisis team run the crisis and let everyone else run the business. Allow no one to second-guess the crisis team.

**Define the real problem and objective** – Define the short and long term problems and articulate objectives for their solutions.

**Contain the problem** – Despite proof of your blamelessness, you may be well served by a gesture of acquiescence, such as a product recall or an out of court settlement. Better for a crisis to cost money that ruin the company and cost money.

**Concern** — Get the bad news first and get it out yourself so it doesn't look like a cover up. You are on the witness stand and the jury is watching your behavior and attitude.

**Assume the worst case will happen** – Realize those people in your company closest to the problem may well be the ones who created it. Hold back your complete trust of the people who seem to know the most.

**Answer what happened through an articulate spokesperson** – Be consistent about what happened and why. Don't change spokesperson and tell them what you're going to do to solve the problem.

**Use direct communication** – Deliver messages to your most important audiences directly. Don't depend on the media if you want it done right. Your corporate identity is on the line

## **Appendix G**

### **Commanders Guide to Crisis Communications**

#### **Develop A Crisis Plan**

- Establish response procedures for most and least likely scenarios
- Test and update the plan frequently

#### **Establish A Crisis Response Team**

- Identify key team members
- Designate roles and responsibilities, keep team small
- Determine if event is a crisis or incident, don't over react

#### **Identify Key Spokespersons**

- Senior manager with authority to make decisions
- Speak with one voice, limit number of spokespersons
- Public affairs representative handles media requirements

#### **Manage The First 25 Hours Vigilantly**

- Be decisive and authoritative
- Be prepared for media coverage
- Remain calm and in control

#### **Media Train All Potential Spokespersons**

- Conduct live on camera media training interviews
- Develop and deliver key messages
- Know the facts
- Don't volunteer negative information

#### **Talk To The Media**

- Tell your story, highlight the positive
- Show concern, empathy, conviction and action
- Get information out in a timely manner
- Be accessible and cooperative with the media
- Control the interview
- Establish ground rules
- Know who the reporter is



## **Appendix H**

### **Tips for Developing Messages**

#### **Be Prepared**

- Write messages on index card
- Print, television or radio – live or taped
- Know the subject, who's the interviewer, anyone else being interviewed
- Remain calm

#### **Develop Key Messages**

- Identify 3-5 points you want the public to understand
- Keep them short and specific – 20 second sound bites
- Repeat your message
- Know your audience (internal, external, local, national)

#### **Control The Interview**

- Tell the public what you want them to know
- Use personal and professional experiences
- Don't repeat what you don't believe
- Label personal opinions
- Correct inaccurate statements on the spot

#### **Establish Rules Of Engagement**

- Set ground rules – topics to be discussed, length of interview
- Is the interview on the record, off the record, or for background only

#### **Cardinal Rules**

- If you don't want to see it in print or hear it on the air, don't say it!
- Engage the brain before putting mouth in gear!

## **Appendix I**

### **Effective Crisis Communication Techniques**

#### **Be Ready To Respond**

- Develop a crisis plan
- Establish and train a crisis response team
- Practice the most and least likely crisis and develop course of action
- Determine if the event is a real crisis but don't underestimate

#### **Identify And Media Train Key Spokespersons**

- Develop simple key messages
- Show concern, care, compassion and conviction
- Anticipate questions and prepare responses for the media
- Conduct live on camera media training interviews
- Develop and establish a positive working relationship with media

#### **Talk To The Media**

- Deliver your key messages and tell your story
- Acknowledge the obvious, don't minimize the seriousness of the crisis
- Identify and focus on the positive, tell what you're doing to solve crisis
- Get all the confirmed facts
- Don't volunteer negative information
- Show concern, empathy, conviction and action
- Get information out in a timely manner
- Be accessible and cooperative with the media
- Control the interview
- Be aware of media deadlines

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